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RR RUEH DU RUEH MR RUEH RN
DE RUEH SA #1006/01 1331531
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 121531Z MAY 08
FM AMEMBASSY PRETORIA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4441
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE
RUEHSB/AMEMBASSY HARARE 3660
RUEHTN/AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN 5597
RUEH DU/AMCONSUL DURBAN 9814
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRETORIA 001006

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/S

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/12/2017

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SUBJECT: MDC ANNOUNCES THEY WILL PARTICIPATE IN RUN-OFF

REF: PRETORIA 997

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Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Don Teitelbaum. Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

1. (C) SUMMARY. On 10 May, MDC Leader Morgan Tsvangirai announced that the MDC would participate in a run-off and that it must be held no later than 24 May. However, MDC participation is on the condition that SADC peacekeepers be allowed in to monitor the run-off, international election observers are allowed full access to the electoral process, that all political violence end; that ZEC be "reconstituted," that the electoral process be demilitarized, and that domestic and international media be permitted to cover the election without hindrance or interference. Tsvangirai said that he would return to Zimbabwe by today, 12 May, but Post has since learned he may go back later in the week, with his return dependent on security concerns. MDC's announcement took place against additional negative media coverage of Mbeki's mediation attempts, with Mbeki appearing hand-in-hand with Mugabe in Harare only the day before. The MDC's announcement and their refusal to speak to Mbeki, coupled with Mbeki's less than neutral comments last week, have provoked public speculation about whether Mbeki can effectively mediate. END SUMMARY.

MDC TO CONTEST IN RUN-OFF

2. (C) MDC Leader Morgan Tsvangirai on 10 May announced during a press conference in Pretoria that the MDC will participate in a run-off presidential election, but that the run-off must be held no later than 24 May (which would fall within 21 days of ZEC's 02 May official announcement of the 29 March election). (NOTE: Only five days earlier on 05 May, the MDC had announced it would publicize its decision whether or not to participate in a run-off after the ZEC officially set a run-off date. END NOTE) An upbeat MDC Treasurer Roy Bennett told PolOff on 10 May that the run-off would be held "in honor of the Zimbabwean people who are being tortured and killed," adding that "we just need to get this over with."

3. (C) The MDC indicated their participation was contingent on a list of 16 conditions being met. MDC Advisor Kathi Walther (protect) subsequently highlighted five of these to PolOff as being "dealbreakers:"

-- International peacekeepers and international election monitors must be allowed in and given unfettered access to

the entire country;

-- Domestic and international media must be permitted to cover the election without hindrance or interference;

-- All political violence must end immediately;

-- ZEC must be "reconstituted;"

-- The electoral process must be "demilitarized."

(NOTE: This last condition was mentioned to PolOff on 10 May by both Walther and Bennett, but was not included in any press coverage. END NOTE)

TSVANGIRAI'S RETURN DELAYED YET AGAIN

¶4. (C) Despite Tsvangirai's claim during the press conference that he would go back to Zimbabwe within two days, his return has again been delayed as he continues to travel around the region. According to IDASA analyst Sydney Masamvu, Tsvangirai told him he would like to return to Harare on 14 May, but is still waiting for the "signal" that it is safe or him to return. Tsvangirai also told Masamvu that his meetings with Angolan President dos Santos on 11 May went "surprisingly well." Dos Santos gave Tsvangirai an hour of his time (compared to only 20 minutes from Mozambican President Guebuza on 09 May), promised in his capacity as head of SADC's security committee to send 500 peacekeepers to monitor the election, and complained that Mugabe keeps harping on the UK's role in Zimbabwe's past, as if only the UK were the only colonizer on the continent. Masamvu also

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said Tsvangirai will be going to Lesotho on 13 May for meetings.

PRESIDENT MBEKI TAKING A BEATING

¶5. (SBU) The MDC's press conference occurred against a backdrop of very unfavorable coverage of President Mbeki's mediation efforts. On 09 May, President Mbeki flew to Harare for closed-door sessions with President Mugabe. Again, images of Mbeki smiling and walking hand-in-hand with Mugabe dominated South African media. The MDC's announcement also coincided with a leadership summit of South Africa's ruling tri-partite alliance (ANC, Congress of South African Trade Unions, and the South African Communist Party), where press reports note that new ANC power brokers were all too eager to point out Mbeki's recent failures, including his mediation attempts in the Zimbabwean crisis. Immediately before the summit, the SACP central committee caucus called on Mbeki to step down before next year's election.

COMMENT

¶6. (C) Though it is hard to gauge what is being done under the auspices of Mbeki's mediation attempts, many commentators and analysts are beginning to question Mbeki's ability to deliver, with one editorial going so far as to label him Mugabe's "enabler." PolOff was told by the Irish Ambassador that Tsvangirai refused to speak to Mbeki again on Friday, 09 May, making it possible that Mbeki did not know about MDC's press conference or dealbreakers in advance. Previous public statements indicate that Mbeki may not be sympathetic to the MDC's current demands. Mbeki said last week there is no need for new outside observers, implying that anyone who thought otherwise was racist (reftel). He also clarified a couple of weeks ago that there was no "electoral crisis" in Zimbabwe,

suggesting he may not feel the ZEC needs to be "reconstituted." Last, the South African retired military team currently investigating reports of violence was sent in at the ANC's insistence, not Mbeki's (reftel). That said, Post believes that the MDC's demands will gain some traction. Mugabe has repeatedly and effectively manipulated Mbeki for years by making demands.

17. (C) There are many irons in the fire right now, with high-level conversations taking place on a daily basis throughout the region. In fact, the increasingly positive and public role the ANC has played has changed the shape of the debate in South Africa. However, it is not clear whether it reflects a deep desire to support democracy in Zimbabwe, or simply an opportunity to kick Mbeki while he is politically vulnerable. We suspect it is a combination of both. Unfortunately, these multiple efforts to find a solution are not being channeled through or directed by any one person, be it Mbeki or otherwise. Tsvangirai has refused to speak to Mbeki, but is speaking ANC President Jacob Zuma. Mbeki and his advisers are speaking to Mugabe, some ZANU-PF members, and members of the Mutambara faction of the MDC, which is not united with Tsvangirai's faction. Moreover, Tsvangirai also appears to be in regular contact with the Presidents of Botswana, Mozambique, Zambia, and Angola, but it is unclear if these SADC leaders are engaging Mbeki, Mugabe, or even other SADC members.
TEITELBAUM